

California Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Services Division

STRATEGIC PLAN

Fiscal Years 2004-2008



VETERAN CLAIMS AND RIGHTS PROGRAM
California Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Services Division

Basic Information

Agency Name:	California Department of Veterans Affairs
Program Name:	Veterans Claims and Rights
Agency Executive and Management Staff	Thomas Johnson, Secretary Roger Brautigan, Undersecretary John Hanretty, Director of Operations Jack Kirwan, Chief, Veterans Services Division Ralph Cansimbe, Headquarters Office Manager Dave West, Oakland District Office Manager Bill McClure, Los Angeles Office Manager Tracy Greenamyre, San Diego Office Manager
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INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Plan (the Plan) is designed to set forth the challenges facing the Veterans Claim and Rights Program (the Program), and the steps the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA) will take to manage issues over the next five years. This Plan will be a resource that will enhance management's ability to address veterans' needs and issues, and make program decisions.

There are three sections to this plan:

- **Section 1: Strategic Plan**, which discusses the Program's core principles, background, organization, product lines, goals, objectives, and actions. While defining the mission, goals and performance measures, the needs and expectations of customers and stakeholders were considered.
- **Section 2: Financial Plan**, which discusses financial operations, goals and status.
- **Section 3: Marketing Plan**, identifies ongoing marketing efforts and marketing needs to meet program objectives.

The Strategic Plan will map milestones between the present and the Department's vision of the future.

The purpose of the Strategic Plan is to:

- Define the purpose of the organization.
- Prepare framework for the department's orderly change process.
- Prepare a strategy for the allocation of resources in a manner that will allow the Program to meet its priorities and goals in light of program challenges and a shifting political and economic environment.
- Establish realistic goals and objectives consistent with the Program's mission in a defined timeframe.
- Communicate goals and objectives to Agency management and staff, as well as program stakeholders.
- Provide a basis from which outcomes and progress can be measured.

Objectives of the plan were formulated by reviewing the Department's strategic plan, current policies and procedures, impact of recent budget reductions, outside audit findings and recommendations, internal management reviews, and discussions with senior department executives, staff, and stakeholders. Objectives will continue to evolve with additional input and as resource availability changes.

Key assumptions identified as a basis for the plans include:

- The California veteran population will decrease from 2.5 million in 2000 to 1.2 million in 2020.
- California veterans appear to underutilize their veteran benefits. Nationally, in the federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2003, 11.08 percent of the veteran population received compensation and pension benefits. In the same year, only 10.29 percent of California veterans were receiving compensation and pension benefits.
- Northern California Veterans Cemetery construction will proceed with a completion date of November 2005
- No legislation adverse to the Program will pass, and resources will not be diverted for uses outside the Program.

This plan contains components specified in the Department of Finance Strategic Planning Guidelines, as well as embraces the spirit of the California Performance Review. The Plan will be reviewed and updated annually. The Plan was prepared using a five year horizon and takes both short and long-range approaches to planning. Regular reviews and updates will be used to check progress, reassess the validity of the plan, respond to changing circumstances and take advantage of emerging opportunities. An annual addendum will be prepared in July of each year to identify specific action items to be accomplished within the resources provided in the Budget Act.

Department management is committed to planning for the future of the program, and the intent is to maintain a program that will be serving veterans now and into the foreseeable future. The Strategic Plan will be used to stimulate change, rather than simply to react to it.

Veteran Services Division Stakeholders

◆ California Veterans	◆ Active Duty Military	◆ County Veteran Service Offices
◆ Veteran Service Organizations	◆ Certified Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBE)	◆ California Legislature
◆ Departmental DVBE Advocates	◆ Community based organizations	◆ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
◆ Department of General Services	◆ United Veteran Councils	◆ California Association of County Veteran Service Offices

SECTION 1: STRATEGIC PLAN

PRINCIPLES

Mission Statement:

Promote and deliver the benefits provided by the grateful State of California to its deserving veterans and their families.

Vision Statement:

We will meet the needs of the State's veterans, and their dependents, now and into the future by expertly administering current programs, identifying unmet veteran needs, and implementing action to meet those needs. We will be recognized for our technical expertise and caring attitude in the provision of veteran benefits.

Core Values:

- Veterans have earned our respect and are our reason for being, our common purpose, all our efforts are directed toward meeting their needs.
- We are committed to communicating with veterans, veterans' families, employees, and external stakeholders in a timely, thorough, accurate, understandable, and respectful manner.
- We hear and act upon the concerns and views of veterans, employees, and external stakeholders to bring about improvements in benefits and services, and the climate in which they are provided.
- We value and promote effective and efficient internal processes that consistently produce positive results.
- We foster an environment that promotes personal and institutional innovation, sharing and leveraging of resources, risk-taking, and teamwork.
- We are open to change and flexible in our attitudes.
- We believe that service, integrity, and respect, are hallmarks of all our interactions.
- We will always perform at the highest level of competence and take pride in accomplishment.
- We will be a "center of excellence" within the department and within state government.
- We are a "can do" organization.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Administration and Organization

The Veterans Services Division administers all programs not directly related to Veterans Homes or the CalVet loan program. The division has four geographic offices: Headquarters in Sacramento and three district offices collocated with the Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) regional offices in Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego. The District Offices also support veteran claims representatives at each of the Veterans Homes of California (VHC).

The Division is authorized 24 positions (including the three VHC positions) and has an annual budget of approximately \$1.7 million for state operations and administers approximately \$3.7 million in local assistance to the counties. Each VHC has a veterans claims representative position authorized within their individual budget; for operational purposes the incumbents report to the respective district office manager; this arrangement ensures full support of the claims activity at each Home while maintaining supervision by subject matter experts.

Services

Veteran Claims

Collectively, the County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO), through claims initiation and development, and the California Department of Veterans Affairs, through claims development and representation, provide assistance to veterans and their dependents in preparing and submitting claims and in representing claimants before the federal, state and local agencies providing veterans benefits.

CDVA District offices are located in each of the three USDVA Regional Offices. The district offices assist veterans and their dependents in obtaining benefits through the process of application and representation of claims. Veterans Claim Representatives are responsible for developing and presenting claims on behalf of veterans, widows, orphans and other dependents. They review adjudication decisions for correctness prior to publication. When warranted they will appear before the USDVA Rating Board and the Board of Veterans Appeals as an advocate for the veteran.

Veterans Claims Representatives are also located at each Veteran Home of California sites, providing claim initiation and development services for residents. These services provide a significant source of funding for veteran home operations by increasing member fees through increased compensation and pension awards, awards of aid and attendance which directly offset costs, and through establishing eligibility for medical care at USDVA facilities which provides for direct cost avoidance.

The Department has a critical relationship with CVSO's statewide in ensuring that veterans receive all eligible benefits. Where the state directly supports services in USDVA regional

offices, the CVSO's provide an underlying network that facilitates the direct support of the individual veteran or family member. They are an integral component in the State's efforts to interface with the individual veteran and veteran family.

While CVSO's are independent local agencies, the State does provide local assistance funding from various sources including General Fund (subvention), Veteran Service Office Fund (VSOF), and reimbursements (MediCal Cost-avoidance). CVSO's provide the local network for initiating claims, providing services and generally assisting veterans, veteran dependents and survivors. CVSO's originate claims for all service organizations as well as for the CDVA (the selection of a power of attorney is an individual veteran decision).

Veteran Benefits

The Division staff provides counseling and referral services for both federal and state veteran benefits. Veteran Services Division administers or supports several state sponsored benefits for veterans, and their spouses and dependents including:

- College Tuition Fee Waiver
 - Property Tax Exemptions
 - Disabled Veteran License Plates
 - Free License Plates for certain veterans
 - Fishing and Hunting Licenses
 - Employment and Unemployment Insurance Assistance
 - State Parks and Recreation Pass
 - Business License, Tax and Fee Waivers
- (All benefits subject to eligibility requirements.)

Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Program

Current state law established a Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) Program in which state agencies have a goal to expend not less than 3% of their annual contracts with DVBE firms. Established in 1989, the DVBE program sets a goal for awarding departments to expend not less than 3 percent of their overall expenditures on DVBE's certified by the Department of General Services (DGS). With the establishment of the three percent goal, the Legislature sought to ensure that disabled veteran business owners had an opportunity for full participation in the State's economy while at the same time fostering increased competition in the marketplace.

Departments that award contracts may meet this goal by either contracting directly with certified DVBE firms or requiring winning bidders to use them as subcontractors. DVBE statutes provide awarding departments the discretion to determine how to implement and enforce the DVBE program. Awarding departments are responsible for establishing their own policies and procedures to ensure their adherence to the 3 percent participation goal.

Historically most awarding agencies have not met the goal. A review of the participation statistics for 2002-03 shows a 2.7% participation rate statewide. Only 48 of the 113 departments reporting met the 3% goal. Approximately 29 agencies did not report at all.

Veteran Cemeteries

Chapter 604, Statutes of 1999 and Military and Veterans Code Section 1400, authorized the construction of the Northern California Veterans Cemetery (NCVC) in Shasta County. This cemetery will be the first state veterans cemetery in California to be established through the USDVA State Veterans Cemetery Grant Program.

The USDVA is providing 100 percent of the design, development, and construction costs. The annual operations and maintenance costs will be a State of California General Fund expense supplemented by reimbursements from the USDVA for burial of veterans, fees charged for spouses and minor children of veterans interred in the cemetery, and funds and services provided by Shasta County through a cooperative local/state agreement.

The NCVC will be the final resting place for several thousand veterans, their spouses and children. Because of this, the manner in which the cemetery is operated from the beginning is very important to veterans, their families, and the entire community. Table 1 is an annual estimate, of the veteran population, veteran deaths, veteran burials, and dependent burials. Construction will be completed by November 2005. Operations staff will be hired in July 2005.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS	DATA	NOTES
Veterans within 75 mile radius	62,922	Standard service area – nine counties
Average annual death rate	1,704	2005-2023 USDVA figures
Usage factor	0.25	25% of the veterans will choose the NCVC
Dependents factor	1.50	1 dependent interred per every 2 veterans interred
Annual burial rate	639	Death rate x usage x dependents factor

Table 1

The Governor's Commission on State Veterans Cemeteries has been established and has the following duties:

- (a) Establish the need for the creation of state veterans' cemeteries and locate and prioritize sites for the future construction of those cemeteries, in accordance with that need.
- (b) Give priority to cemetery sites that meet one or more of the following criteria:
 - (1) The site is available at no cost to the state.
 - (2) The department has previously studied or prepared budget packages, working drawings, or project cost summaries for the site.
 - (3) The parcel size is large enough to support expected interments for at least 20 years.
 - (4) The site has unique patriotic or military significance.

- (5) There is a high concentration of veterans within the service area of the site.
- (6) The site is not compromised by nearby incompatible land uses.
- (c) Report its findings to the Governor and the Legislature not later than May 31, 2005.

The department may not implement any recommendation without statutory authorization, and unless the USDVA State Cemetery Grants Program, as described in Section 2408 of Title 38 of the United States Code, provides 100 percent of the project construction costs associated with the implementation of the commission's recommendation. The commission sunsets on January 1, 2006.

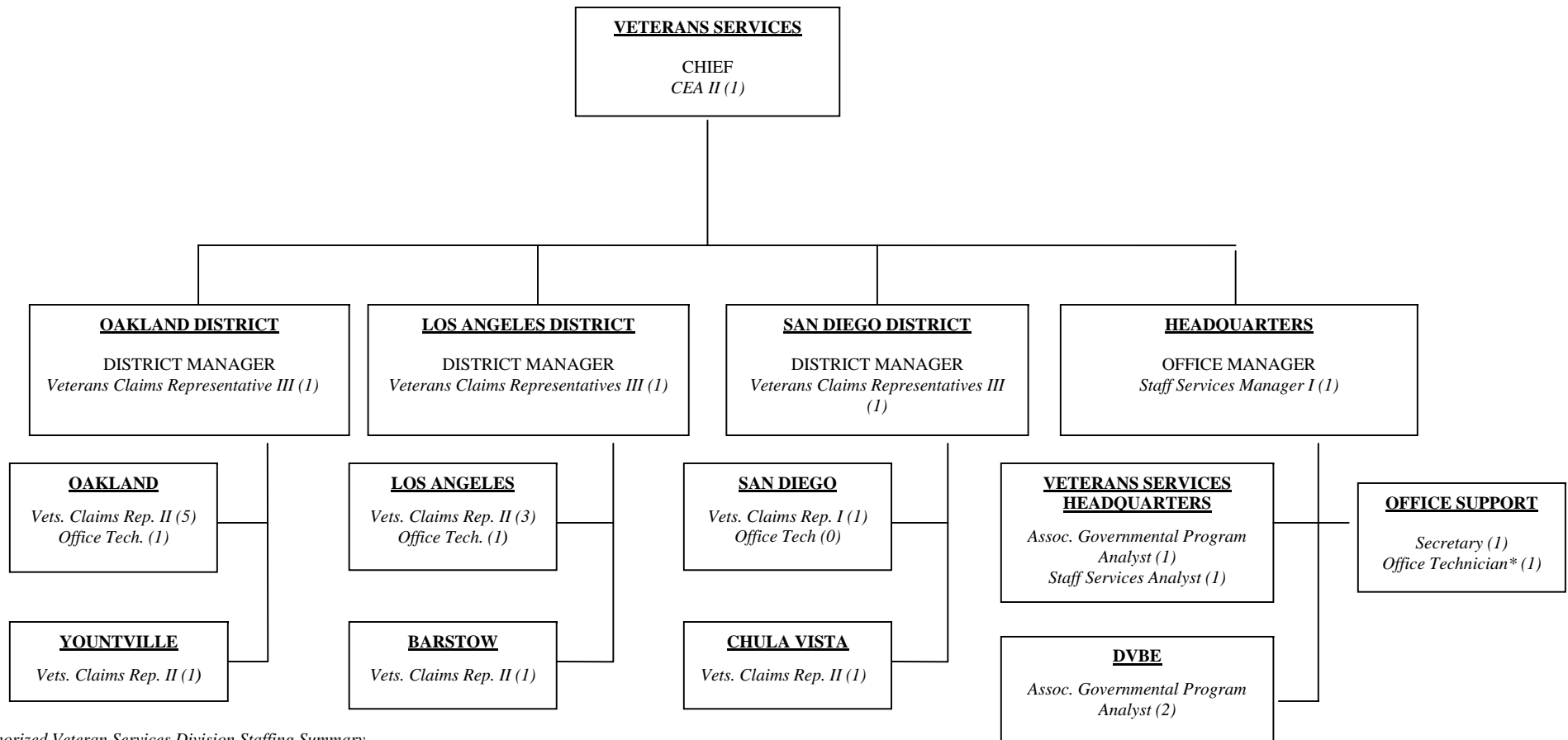
Miscellaneous Programs

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund: The Department provides accounting support for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund which was established to provide for the construction of the memorial. The fund currently provides for maintenance of the memorial supported by donations from the general public.

California Veterans Memorial Registry: The Division supports the California Veterans Memorial Registry by acting as the point-of-contact for veterans to submit individual biographical data for inclusion in the registry. The Information Services Division provides database and hardware support.

California Memorials Registry: Chapter 392, Statutes of 2000 (SB 1635, Schiff), required the Department to establish and maintain a registry of veteran memorials throughout the State. This effort was accomplished through voluntary registration in the database by organizations that support the individual memorials. The registry currently identifies over 400 veterans memorials throughout the State. The registry may be accessed through the Internet at www.cdva.ca.gov.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VETERANS SERVICES DIVISION



Authorized Veteran Services Division Staffing Summary

▪ Career Executive	1
▪ Staff Services Mgr I	1
▪ Veteran Claims Rep III	3
▪ Veteran Claims Rep II	12
▪ Associate Governmental Prog. Analyst	3
▪ Staff Services Analyst	1
▪ Clerical	3

Total 24

*On loan from Executive Office

STRATEGIC GOALS

- 1. Take a leadership role in providing veteran benefits.*
- 2. Provide high quality veteran claims representation.*
- 3. Improve processes related to county veteran services office operations.*
- 4. Improve statewide Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Program participation.*
- 5. Become the national model for State Veteran Cemetery Operations.*

STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Strategic Goal #1: Take a leadership role in providing veteran benefits.

The Veteran Services Division should be a major player in advocating for veteran benefits, promoting participation by veterans in obtaining their benefits, and promoting coordinated efforts by various veteran organizations.

Objectives:

- 1.1. Identify and meet the needs of the State's veterans
- 1.2. Effectively reach all veteran populations.
- 1.3. Monitor performance based upon observable performance standards.
- 1.4. Maintain veteran claim representative expertise within headquarters staff.

Strategic Goal #2: Provide high quality veteran claim representation.

The Veteran Services Division District Offices provide high quality veteran representation at the USDVA Regional offices but are currently understaffed to meet the workload.

Objectives:

- 2.1. Match District Office staffing levels to claims workload in order to maximize claims representation at minimum cost.
- 2.2. Maintain a high level of expertise and currency for veteran claim representatives.
- 2.3. Monitor performance based upon observable standards.

- 2.4. Match veteran claims representative classification series specifications to actual duties performed.

Strategic Goal #3: Improve processes related to county veteran service office operations.

The Veteran Services Division has a critical relationship with county veteran service offices (CVSO's) statewide in ensuring that veterans receive all eligible benefits. Where the state directly supports services in USDVA regional offices, the CVSO's provide the underlying network which integrates with the individual veteran. It is critical that state and local efforts remain coordinated, and use synergetic efforts to ensure public funds are leveraged to provide the maximum effect. CDVA has an obligation to provide training, management assistance and audit CVSO workload accounting but lacks sufficient resources to perform these functions.

Objectives:

- 3.1. Improve communications with CVSO's.
- 3.2. Improve processes to support county veteran service office subvention funding.
- 3.3. Reinvigorate accreditation training.
- 3.4. Establish a consistent, high level of expertise and currency for all accredited veteran claim representatives across all county offices.
- 3.5. Support the use of state funds in the local agencies by monitoring CVSO performance based upon observable performance standards.
- 3.6. Improve the sales of veteran license plates.
- 3.7. Establish a common information/data-sharing system across counties.

Strategic Goal #4: Improve statewide Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Program participation.

The Veteran Services Division has statutory responsibilities as the statewide advocate and to provide for marketing and outreach efforts for the Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBE) program.

Objectives:

- 4.1. Increase the pool of certified DVBE.
- 4.2. Increase the level of DVBE participation in statewide procurement.

Strategic Goal #5: Become the National Model for State Veteran Cemetery Operations.

The Veteran Services Division has responsibility to initiate operations at the Northern California Veterans Cemetery; the cemetery must ensure that initial operations are on-line and highly professional prior to opening day. Additionally the division should support the Governor's Commission on State Cemeteries as subject matter experts.

Objectives:

- 5.1. Complete the construction of the Northern California Veterans Cemetery.
- 5.2. Initiate operations at the Northern California Veterans Cemetery.
- 5.3. Identify additional need for state operated veterans cemeteries.

SECTION 2: FINANCIAL PLAN

THE CURRENT BUDGET

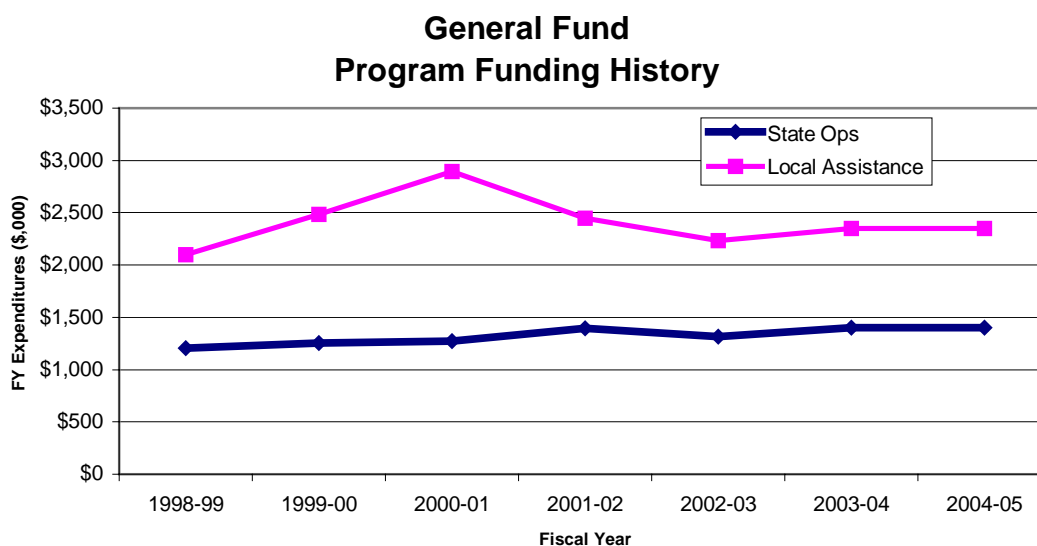
Budget Expenditures

State Operations: These appropriations support the operations of the District Offices and Headquarters including all personal services and operating costs. While the positions authorized at each Veteran Home are also considered state operations, they are appropriated in the separate line items for each Home.

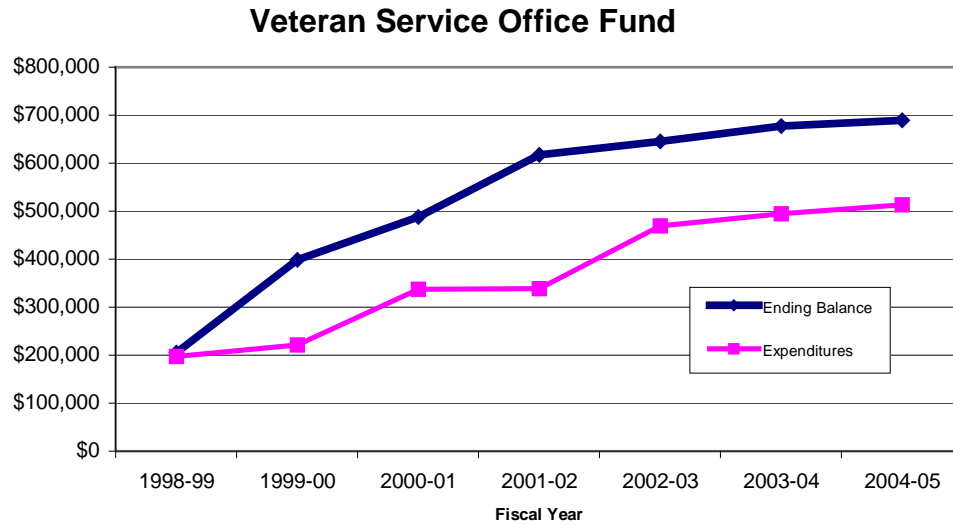
Local Assistance: These appropriations support operations of the county veteran service offices. The Division has no direct control over these funds other than to allocate them to the individual counties as defined by regulation.

Funding Sources

General Fund: General Fund appropriations support the majority of both state operations and local assistance. General Fund supported local assistance is commonly referred to as “subvention” and is allocated to the counties based upon workload data submitted by the counties.



Veteran Service Office Fund: These funds derive from the sale of specialized veteran license plates. Funds are allocated to Headquarters the administration of the fund, advertising and marketing, and training. Funds are allocated to the counties based upon the “net county costs” as defined in regulation.



Reimbursements:

MediCal Cost Avoidance: These funds are made available to the department through an interagency agreement with the Department of Health Services specifically as a result of claims efforts made by both the District Offices and the County Veteran Services Offices which result in reduced costs to the MediCal program due to benefits obtained for veterans, veteran spouses and veteran dependents which result in “cost avoidance” for the MediCal program. Funds are allocated according to Title 12, California Code of Regulations.

DGS Special Revolving Fund: These funds are made available to the department through an interagency agreement with the Department of General Services specifically for use in supporting DVBE advocate activities within CDVA. They may not be used for any other purpose.

BUDGET CHALLENGES AND PRESSURES

Fiscal Year 2004-05:

- Increasing number of veterans due to Gulf War discharges.
- Unfunded expansion of the San Diego District Office
- Unfunded costs to initiate cemetery operations
 - Potential hiring of the Cemetery Manager in March/April and Maintenance Supervisor in May/June.
 - Unfunded travel and training costs for the Manager and Supervisor.
 - Potential contracting effort to prepare policies, procedures and regulations.
- Unfunded costs incurred in support of the Governor's Commission on Cemeteries.
- Insufficient staffing to implement objectives.

Budget Year 2005-06:

- Increasing number of veterans due to Gulf War discharges.
- Approval of budget change proposals to implement objectives.
 - Northern California Veterans Cemetery Operations
 - Veteran Claims Staffing Augmentation
 - Audit and Training Team
 - Veterans Benefits Outreach
 - Veteran Service Officer Continuing Education

Out-year Budgets:

- Expansion of State Veteran Cemetery program.

MARKETING PLAN

California has fewer veterans who receive compensation and pension from the USDVA than the national average; this translates into thousands of eligible veterans not receiving benefits and fewer federal dollars flowing into the State's economy. The marketing plan seeks resources to apply to public/private and state/local partnerships to establish outreach programs to ensure veterans are aware of their benefits and to facilitate the application process. Outreach will have components to specifically address homeless veteran outreach

- 10.29% of California's veterans received compensation and pension benefits; the national average is 11.08%. If California achieved the national average, approximately 18,000 additional veterans would receive benefits.
- California collects less than the national average in per capita veteran compensation and pension benefits. If these 18,000 veterans were paid at the national average approximately \$20.3 million would flow into the state's economy.

Ongoing Marketing Efforts:

- Benefit Brochures Production (Objective 1.2)
- DVBE Outreach (Objective 4.1)
 - DVBE Branding
 - Attendance at veteran related events, small business specific events.
 - Sales support equipment and software.
- Stand down support (Objective 1.2)
- Veteran License Plate Inserts (Objective 3.6)

Marketing Needs:

- Correct the Department of Motor Vehicles website to allow on-line ordering of veteran license plates. (Objective 3.6)
- Conduct statewide survey of veterans to identify specific needs and service shortfalls (Objective 1.1).
- Welcome Home Letter (Objective 1.2)
 - Historical program currently in disuse.
 - Veteran addresses are difficult to collate.
 - Should include all CDVA program information.
- Distribution of DD214 information to appropriate CVSO (Objective 1.2).
 - Distribution of copies of DD214 has raised privacy issues within Department.
 - Distribution of information will allow CVSO to perform local outreach.
 - Information is only being received in hard-copy (DD 214) resulting in a cumbersome process to extract data by hand.

- Electronic processing of DD214 is being researched.
- Benefit Information to All Guard and Reserve Drill Sites (Objective 1.2)
 - Unique use of Guard and Reserve components in recent military operations causes gap in attendance at Transition Assistance Programs (TAP) that active duty personnel are required to attend.
 - Stand-up displays in each drill site will put information and resources into veteran hands on a monthly basis.
- Supermarkets (Objectives 1.2 and 1.3)
 - Other states have reported success in providing one-stop benefit information through the use of one-day events in areas where it may be difficult for veterans to travel to “hard” facilities to learn about and file for benefits.
 - Allows focus on under-represented populations (minorities and women veterans).
- Cemetery Operations (Objectives 5.1 and 5.2)
 - Opening Ceremony –
 - Ceremony will provide a unique high visibility event to advertise cemetery operations, including an opportunity for large scale initial advertising efforts.
 - Support BCP has small amount of funding included for initial advertising efforts.
 - Ongoing Advertising – marketing program needs to be developed to provide for ongoing effort to ensure full utilization of cemetery annual capacity.

Demographics:

Veteran demographics for the State of California are presented in Appendix A and include a population breakdown by county in five-year increments from 2000 through 2005. Source data is the USDVA VetPop2001 database.

Chart 3 provides a representation of the relative number of compensation and pension (C&P) cases by county. The national average is 11.08% of the veteran population received compensation and pension benefits. California averages 10.29% of its veteran population who receive C&P benefits; counties highlighted in red in Chart 3 are also below the national average.

A simple mathematical model was used to prioritize where outreach efforts should be focused. The model uses each county’s estimated veteran population and the difference between the counties average C&P cases and the national average to calculate a weighted veteran population. Outreach efforts can then prioritized based upon the weighted population. The following table summarizes the top ten counties for outreach efforts based upon this model (full results are included in appendix A).

		VetPop	% C&P
1	LOS ANGELES	447,067	7.93%
2	ORANGE	178,004	5.69%
3	SANTA CLARA	96,369	6.70%
4	ALAMEDA	90,401	8.14%

5	CONTRA COSTA	73,625	8.04%
6	SAN MATEO	44,770	6.90%
7	VENTURA	57,243	8.55%
8	RIVERSIDE	133,398	10.05%
9	SONOMA	40,943	8.03%
10	SAN BERNARDINO	126,973	10.12%



Compensation and Pension Cases 2004 California County Data

*(population figures are
from Vet Pop 2001-Adj
9/30/03)*



Chart 3